

NATURE AND BOOKS.

REFLECTIONS BY DR. VAN DYKE AND MR. MARIE.

FISHERMAN'S LUCK AND SOME OTHER UN-CERTAIN THINGS. By Henry van Dyke. Octavo. Pp. 26. Charles Scribner's Sons.

MY STUDY FIRE. By Hamilton Wright Mabie. With Sixty-five Illustrations by Mend Alice and Genevieve Cowles. Octavo. Pp. x, 288. Dodd, Mead & Co.

Dr. van Dyke carries with him, when he wanders by the fishing streams, exactly the right temperament, and this we say despite the fact that he is capable of what some fishermen would regard as heresies. Take, for example, his essay on "Talkability." Mentioning that the inventor of the Maxim that "Fishermen must not talk" is lost in the mists of antiquity, he adds that the man well deserves his fate. "For a more footless rule," he continues, "a conventionalism more obscure and aimless in its tyranny, was never imposed upon an innocent and honorable occupation to diminish its pleasure and discount its profits. Why, in the name of all that is genial, should anglers go about their harmless sport in stealthy silence like conspirators, or sit together in a boat, glum and penitential, like naughty schoolboys on the bench of disgrace?" This goes to the root of the matter. What layman has not been at once amused and exasperated by the hierophantic manner in which many a sportsman goes about his business?

We use the word business advisedly, for it is extremely difficult to see where the pleasure of sport comes in if a man is to follow it in more solemn and intense mood than even the most serious crisis in his financial matters, say, would excite. The tale is told—it may be a fisherman's tale, but we let that pass—of a certain brawling stream in Virginia, with smooth and shining pools here and there, in which the fish are as plentiful as they are plucky. To this stream have come, for many years, a pair of anglers imbued with the true passion. As the years have added up, however, they have both developed gaudy tendencies, and wading is no longer as comfortable for them as it used to be. So each has trained his horse to advance quietly into the river at suitable points, and there, astride, the anglers sit, with everything they need at their saddlebows, and they fish at their ease. Dr. van Dyke we hope, and, indeed, believe, would approve the course of these anglers, though some of their companions have laughed them to scorn; for we gather from these pages that the author fishes, not simply for what he can catch on his hook, but for the thoughts inspired by the scenes through which he rambles, for the bookish memories that are evoked by his efforts, for all those elusive and delightful things, in brief, which appeal to a lover of nature as well as to a lover of fishing.

It is the fact that his love of talk by the river side has not been put to the severest test, for he is not certain, any more than anybody else can be, that a fish can hear, in the proper sense of the word. Experienced anglers and students of fishery laws, he says, "are divided upon the question," and while they are he may feel that together he talks or not makes no difference. But we like to think, as he really gives us grounds for thinking, that though fishes could detect the faintest sound he would still hold the genial views expressed in this book on "talkability." We choose for special comment this essay, because it illustrates in perfection Dr. van Dyke's theory of life out of doors, but there is much else in his volume that is fresh, humane and charming. He has genuine knowledge of nature underneath his light and graceful vein of humor, and the books that have fostered his love of the woods and streams have never brought the air of the library into his work, but count among his natural and vitalized possessions. A wise commentator he is, too, introducing artlessly into his notes the little touches that make for a kindlier understanding of human nature. He does not moralize, but reflects unobtrusively on the serious things in life. "Fishesmen's Luck," in a word, is a captivating and a valuable little book.

Ten years ago Mr. Mabie first published "My Study Fire." The book has worn well, for its qualities are genuine. They include a feeling for nature that is at once unaffected and enthusiastic. If Mr. Mabie cares for a landscape or a flower, it is, in the last resort, for reasons difficult to put into words. He is sensitive to its beauty, and that is enough. But natural beauty raises, in the author's mind, thoughts of poetry, thoughts of art, and so in writing of it he gives us the impressions of a cultivated observer. Reading and imagination go to enrich his talk, and "My Study Fire" contains passages descriptive and critical, things that send a reader out of doors, but also with a book in his hand, or, if not that, then with the memory of great poets and prose writers in his mind. Now and then we hesitate to follow Mr. Mabie's guidance. He talks of Richard Jefferies with an enthusiasm that we can hardly approve, and this enthusiasm makes us tremble for the preservation of the author's authority. We cannot but regard a reader's judgment on Richard Jefferies as a test of his ability to look at nature, and at nature in literature, in the right way. Mr. Mabie's acceptance of the author of "Field and Hedge-row" is a little too warm. Yet in justice we must add that he is not often at fault, and, moreover, he is possibly to be pardoned for a leaning toward the literary side of nature, considering that this volume is not strictly an open air book, but one embodying thoughts in a study. It is, as a mere piece of writing, the best of the author's productions. His style is clear and possesses a certain beguiling elegance. It has been treated with due respect in this edition, which is beautifully printed and contains a number of sympathetic and well executed illustrations.

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